

THE HOUSE OF THE RED FOX



BY MIRIAM BYRNE



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THE HOUSE OF THE RED FOX



MARY ELLEN COULD SEE AN IMMENSE WHITE CASTLE ENCLOSED
BY A GREAT WHITE WALL

THE HOUSE OF THE RED FOX

By MIRIAM BYRNE

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ILLUSTRATED BY
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*This story of a motherless little girl
is dedicated to the
most motherly mother I ever knew*
MY OWN

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THE HOUSE OF THE RED FOX

The House of the Red Fox

CHAPTER I

THE LITTLE OLD LADY

IT was Saturday and Mary Ellen had worked hard all day. Her aunt had called her early that morning because there was so much Saturday cleaning to do.

There was a window beside the sink and Mary Ellen could look out and see the big hill where all the children were coasting and having a glorious time.

"I shall hurry up and get through with the breakfast dishes," she said, "and then I can go out to play."

But when the breakfast dishes were done Mary Ellen's aunt had finished the sweeping and the rooms were ready for Mary Ellen to dust. When the dusting was done, it was time to peel the potatoes. When the potatoes were peeled it was time to set the table. And so the morning went with Mary Ellen busy all the time.

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"I must hurry, hurry, hurry," said Mary Ellen after dinner. "Then when I get through with these dishes perhaps auntie will let me go out to coast on the hill."

Poor little Mary Ellen! When the dishes were done there was mending to do. She was just learning to mend and had to be very careful to get it neat. So it took her a long time. When it was at last finished there were more potatoes to peel for supper and the table to set. And so the afternoon had gone and Mary Ellen had been too busy to go out to play with the other children.

As she cleared the supper table she looked at the clock.

"It is half-past seven now," she said, "and it will be half-past eight before I am through. Then all the children will go in. Besides I shall be too tired to do anything but go to bed. How I wish I had a sister to wipe the dishes for me. How I wish my dear mother were alive. She would not let me work so hard all the time, but would want me to go out and play."

When she thought of her mother who was dead, the big tears came to her eyes and she could hardly keep from crying.

She left the window shade up so that she could watch the boys and girls in their long swift ride from the top of the hill away to the

THE LITTLE OLD LADY

end. There were all sorts of sleds and all sorts of children. There were little boys who laid flat on their "bob-sleds" and went down alone. There were big boys who had big sleds that held two or three or four. There was one boy, a Red-haired Boy, with a great big sled that held six by crowding.

There were girls too. Little girls who hung after their brothers and coaxed to be taken down. Big girls who did not have to coax their brothers because the other big boys always took them down.

"They do not know how lucky they are," said Mary Ellen, as she turned away from the window, "to have mothers and fathers and brothers and sisters."

She lifted the heavy tea-kettle from the stove and poured some hot water into the dish pan. Just as she was starting the dishes there was a knock at the door. Mary Ellen opened it and saw a Little Old Lady standing on the step. The old lady was leaning on a stout cane and bending over as if she were tired or weak. The bonnet she wore was so big that Mary Ellen could hardly see her face. Her dress was black and very plain and shabby.

"I am cold and tired," said the Little Old Lady. "May I come in and rest?"

"Yes," said Mary Ellen, "come in and I shall make you some tea to warm you up."

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She put a chair near the fire so the Little Old Lady could put her feet on the hearth and warm them. Then she made some nice fresh tea and toasted bread.

"You are a good, kind little girl," said the old lady, "and I shall reward you by doing the dishes so that you may go out and play."

Mary Ellen clapped her hands.

"Oh, how lovely," she cried. Then she stopped. "But you are tired," she added, "and you are a stranger, too. My aunt might not like it if I left you here alone."

"The tiredness does not matter," said the Little Old Lady, "because I can have the dishes done in a second."

She waved her cane. The dish cloth started to spin around and the dish towel flew from the line where it hung. The dishes rose right out of the pan and were wiped by the towel as fast as they were washed. In a moment they were no longer soiled and greasy. They stood in a bright, clean pile on the kitchen table.

Of course Mary Ellen was delighted.

"All I have to do now," she said, "is to put them away."

But even as she spoke the dishes flew over her head and into the pantry. Mary Ellen was afraid they might drop and be broken so she ran into the pantry to see if they were



BUT, EVEN AS SHE SPOKE, THE DISHES FLEW OVER HER HEAD
INTO THE PANTRY

THE LITTLE OLD LADY

safe. There they were, all neatly put away just where they belonged.

“You see that everything is all right,” said the Little Old Lady, “now run out and play. I shall sit here beside the stove and mind the kitchen and no one will know the difference.”

So Mary Ellen put on her tam-o'-shanter and coat and ran out.

CHAPTER II

MARY ELLEN'S DISAPPOINTMENT

WHEN she got out of the yard and down to the corner where she could see the sleds go racing past and hear the shouts and laughter of the boys and girls, Mary Ellen became so excited she started to run. In just a few moments she had reached the top of the long hill, all out of breath.

She was so excited she hardly noticed where she was going and bumped into a little group of boys and girls. Then she stumbled and fell into a big mound of soft snow. The children thought it great fun to see her sprawling around. One boy pushed a girl down on top of her. The girl pulled the boy and all the rest of the children joined in the fun. In a moment Mary Ellen was at the bottom of a mass of boys and girls, all kicking and pushing and rolling. Those at the bottom got the worst of it, and Mary Ellen, who was not used to such rough play, was stiff and bruised when they got up. However, she took the play as good fun and followed the group of children as they got in line to coast, hoping

MARY ELLEN'S DISAPPOINTMENT

they might take her down on their sleds. But they had just enough sleds for themselves and poor Mary Ellen was left at the top of the hill all alone.

She stood and watched them load up and go off, but every sled was full so no one asked her to go down. After a while she began to feel cold and had to jump and hop from one foot to the other to keep warm. But her clothes had got wet in the snow pile and there was no warmth in them. Then her ankle began to hurt where one of the children had kicked it in the scramble. She had just made up her mind to give up all hopes of a ride and go home when the Red-haired Boy, with the big sled that held six, came up.

"I am going to take little ones this time," he cried. "Anybody who has not got a sled can come. All aboard."

Mary Ellen's heart bounded as she ran over to his sled. She did not like to push and shove ahead of the others and before she knew what had happened the sled was full. Down the hill it went and left Mary Ellen standing alone at the top again.

"Next time I'll push and shove like the rest," she said to herself as she heard the shouts of the little ones as they clung to one another as the sled flew down the hill. So she waited for the Red-haired Boy to come up

THE HOUSE OF THE RED FOX

with his sled. She waited a long, long time, but he did not come.

"He must have gone home," said Mary Ellen.

Then she noticed that almost all the little children had gone and that only the big boys and girls were left. She hoped that some of these big boys and girls might take her down with them because she was so little and did not have a sled of her own. She waited and waited until her teeth chattered with the cold and her ankle hurt so badly she could hardly walk. Then she limped down the hill, across the street, through the yard and into the kitchen.

The Little Old Lady had gone and the kitchen fire was almost out. With cold, stiff fingers Mary Ellen shook the fire down and put more wood in the stove. Sad and cold and tired, she at last crept into her lonely little bed without having had one ride.

Sunday morning she had a sore throat; her aunt made her stay in bed all day and drink hot ginger tea. Mary Ellen did not like the ginger tea, she did not like to stay in bed, and altogether she felt very miserable. All day she kept hoping that the Little Old Lady might come and charm the cold away. All day she lay in bed, so sad and lonely, with no one to comfort her. All

MARY ELLEN'S DISAPPOINTMENT

evening she listened and listened for a knock on the kitchen door. But the Little Old Lady did not come.

However, the ginger tea and the warmth and rest did good work and Monday morning Mary Ellen felt much better. Monday night, just as she was about to start the dishes there came the same soft, timid little knock at the door. She ran to open it. There stood the same Little Old Lady, in the same little old black dress, leaning on her big cane. The Little Old Lady walked right in and sat down beside the stove.

"Did you have a good time coasting?" she asked.

Mary Ellen did not like to disappoint her by saying she had not had a nice time, but still she had to tell the truth.

"It was awfully good of you to do the dishes so I could go out," she said, "but ——"

"There," said the Little Old Lady, "I was afraid the other children might be too selfish to take you on their sleds. I ought to have thought of that sooner. Well, never mind. To-night I shall do the dishes so that you can go out and have the most glorious time of your life."

"If I only could," said Mary Ellen, with a sigh.

"You can," said the Little Old Lady. "I

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shall give you a charm to say and you will be sure of getting a chance to coast."

Mary Ellen grew quite excited and ran to fetch her coat and tam-o'-shanter. Before she went out the Little Old Lady waved her cane over the dishes. As on Saturday, the dish cloth washed them, the towel wiped them, and they all flew to their proper places in the pantry.

When Mary Ellen was ready to go the Little Old Lady said,

"This is the charm. Go to the top of the hill. There you will see a Red-haired Boy, standing under the lamp-post. Go up to this boy and say, 'How-do.'"

"Yes," said Mary Ellen, anxious to hear the rest. "What else shall I say?"

"He will say, 'Hello.' Be sure to wait for him to say 'Hello.' Then you must say, —'I have never gone down the hill on a sled.' That is the charm."

"I am afraid he will think I am hinting," said Mary Ellen.

"No," said the Little Old Lady, "he will not think that. It is a good charm. You will see how well it will work."

So again Mary Ellen started out.

CHAPTER III

THE RED-HAIRED BOY

UNDER the lamp-post at the top of the hill, stood the Red-haired Boy who owned the big sled.

It was hard for Mary Ellen to go up and say "How-do" to a boy she did not know. But it was part of the charm and she had to do it. So she walked over very quickly and said it in a low, frightened voice. Then she waited for the boy to speak.

"Hello," said he, looking down at her in surprise.

"I have never gone down the hill on a sled," said Mary Ellen.

"Jiminy," cried the Red-haired Boy. "That is a shame. You do not know what you have missed. Come on down."

Mary Ellen sat down on the sled and the Red-haired Boy pulled her over to the starting place. He sat in front to steer and two boys and two girls got on in back.

"Everybody ready!" cried the Red-haired Boy.

Away they went! Mary Ellen held on

THE HOUSE OF THE RED FOX

tight and tried to catch her breath. She was not frightened, but she had the queerest feeling,—just as if most of her had been left behind at the top of the hill. Down, down, down, fast and straight went the “Six-shooter” with its load of shouting boys and girls. Before Mary Ellen had caught her breath they were at the bottom of the hill and her first ride was over.

The second time she was able to catch her breath sooner. Again and again the red-haired boy took her down on his sled. But never again did she have that same glorious, breathless feeling that she had the first time.

The Red-haired Boy wanted every one to have a fair chance, so he made the other children take turns.

“But you just stay on,” he said to Mary Ellen. “You do not have to take turns.”

So it was Mary Ellen’s turn all the time.

The other children shouted and talked, but Mary Ellen just held on tight and kept saying to herself, “Oh, what luck.”

Finally the Red-haired Boy said,

“All aboard for the last trip on the ‘Six-shooter,’” and they went down for the last time that night.

When they got to the bottom they went over to the little bake-shop at the corner. There was a sign, in the window,

THE RED-HAIRED BOY

“HOT BUTTER BUNS.

One for a cent.

Six for a nickel.”

“Hurray,” said the Red-haired Boy, feeling in his pocket. “I have a nickel so I can treat you all.”

While they were standing around the stove in the little bake-shop, eating their buns, the Red-haired Boy told Mary Ellen that he and his father had made the “Six-shooter.”

“Saturday we made a little house of snow,” he said. “I wish you could see it. The cutest little house,—nice enough for anybody to live in.”

“I wish I could see it,” said Mary Ellen. “Your father must be awfully nice.”

“He is,” said the Red-haired Boy. “He is the doctor. He and my mother are away now. I wish they would come back.”

When the other children went home, Mary Ellen had to tear herself away from the best time she had ever had. She was too tired and happy to mind the cold, hard bed and quickly fell asleep to dream of little old ladies, red-haired boys, big six-shooter sleds, and a little house of snow.

CHAPTER IV

THE ENCHANTED CHOPPING-BOWL

ON Tuesday night the folks were through with supper early. Mary Ellen had finished the dishes at half-past seven and was so anxious to get out that she did not wait for the Little Old Lady. She left the kitchen door unlocked for her, however, and poked the fire so that the kitchen would be nice and warm. Then she quickly ran to the top of the hill and stood under the lamp-post to watch for the Red-haired Boy.

After she had been waiting a long time she at last saw the "Six-shooter." But another boy was pulling it.

"Reddy went skating," said this boy to the others, "and he let me take the 'Six-shooter.'"

Mary Ellen's heart fell for she knew there was no hope of her getting a ride if the Red-haired Boy did not come.

"I might as well go home, now," she said sadly. "No use in standing around and catching cold the way I did Saturday night."

When she opened the kitchen door she saw

THE ENCHANTED CHOPPING-BOWL

the Little Old Lady warming herself at the stove.

"Back so soon?" said the Little Old Lady. "What is the matter?"

"The Red-haired Boy is the only one who had room for me on his sled," said Mary Ellen. "He went skating to-night so I thought I might as well come home. I was hoping you would be here."

"Here I am," answered the Little Old Lady. "I would not forget you, my dear little girl. Just wait until you see what a fine sled I shall fix up for you."

The Little Old Lady thought for a few moments. Then she said,

"Have you a chopping-bowl?"

Mary Ellen brought the chopping-bowl out.

"Now," said the Little Old Lady, "I am going to give you a charm."

She handed Mary Ellen a little gold trinket that looked like a small watch or locket.

"Whenever you are in trouble," she said, "open this charm and read what it says. Then obey."

Mary Ellen opened the charm right away. But its face was blank.

"It will never give you advice," said the Little Old Lady, "unless you really need it. Now I am going to enchant this chopping-

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bowl so that it will go more smoothly and swiftly than the finest toboggan sled that was ever built."

She waved her cane around and over the chopping-bowl. Then she tapped it seven times inside and crossed it seven times on the outside.

"Put the charm in your pocket," she said. "Take the chopping-bowl to the top of the hill and you will have the finest sled of all."

"Don't you think the other children will laugh at me?" asked Mary Ellen.

"Maybe they will," was the answer. "But you must not mind if they do. Obey the charm and I promise you everything will be well."

Mary Ellen was afraid she could not help minding if they laughed at her. She opened the charm and it said, "Go." The other charm had worked so well that she thought it best to obey. So she took the chopping-bowl in her arms and went out.

The bowl was an awkward thing to carry and Mary Ellen had some trouble in getting to the top of the slippery hill. All the other children wondered what she was going to do. Mary Ellen wished they would not stare and whisper and giggle. She hated to get into the chopping-bowl with them all watching her. But the charm said "get in." So in she got.



MARY ELLEN'S CHOPPING-BOWL WENT SMOOTH AND STRAIGHT
DOWN THE HILL

THE ENCHANTED CHOPPING-BOWL

When the enchanted chopping-bowl started off the other children gave a great shout. The bowl went like the wind, faster than the big "Six-shooter" or any sled that had ever gone down that hill. But poor little Mary Ellen thought the children were making fun of her and felt ashamed because she could not have a real sled. If she had only known what the children at the top of the hill were saying she might not have felt so badly.

"Just watch that chopping-bowl fly," said one.

"It is better than any sled I ever saw," said another.

"I am going home to get my mother's chopping-bowl," said a boy who lived near by.

The next night three boys and one little girl appeared with chopping-bowls. But none of them went like Mary Ellen's. They rocked and tipped and spilt. In fact they did everything but go properly.

Mary Ellen's chopping-bowl, without anyone to steer or balance, went smooth and straight down the hill, away, 'way past the place where even the best sleds "let the old cat die." Mary Ellen was too unhappy to notice how far and how fast she was going until she felt herself switched around a corner. Then she took a tighter hold on the edge and looked around. She found herself on the

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finest street in town, skimming down the middle of the snowy road as swift and light as a bird.

There was a horse hitched to a cutter in front of the doctor's house. As the bowl whizzed by the horse shied. A man shouted, "Stop there." A policeman cried, "Halt," pulled out his club, and started to run after Mary Ellen. She was frightened, but the bowl went faster and faster and left the policeman puzzled and out of breath at the first corner.

Mary Ellen saw people raising shades and putting their heads out of windows to ask one another what the excitement was all about. She laughed to think that she, plain little Mary Ellen, should cause so much disturbance on such a fine street.

They turned another corner. There under a lamp-post, with his skates slung over his shoulder, stood the Red-haired Boy. He gave a long whistle of surprise as he saw Mary Ellen speeding down the middle of the road in a chopping-bowl. As she passed him he shouted, "Whoa" and started to chase the chopping-bowl.

"Go slow, go slow," Mary Ellen said to the chopping-bowl, almost thinking it could understand.

But the chopping-bowl kept right on and in

THE ENCHANTED CHOPPING-BOWL

a few minutes the Red-haired Boy was out of sight.

Then Mary Ellen began to get frightened. She wondered where the chopping-bowl was going to take her. She wondered if it would ever stop. They soon passed the last house on the street and were in the open country road with nothing in sight but trees and fields. Snow began to fall and in a little while covered Mary Ellen with a coat, hood and blanket of purest white.

"I hate to be a cry baby," said Mary Ellen as she cuddled down and sobbed herself to sleep.

CHAPTER V

THE LITTLE HOUSE OF SNOW

SHE was awakened by a jerk that almost threw her out of the chopping-bowl. It had stopped in front of a little white house. After looking at the house for a moment Mary Ellen decided to get out and look closer.

A light was shining through the cracks of the door and through the red curtain of the one window. Smoke was coming out of the chimney. When Mary Ellen rested her hands on the window sill and tried to peak in, she found that the house was made of snow. The curtain was drawn away down so she could not see anything at the window. But there was a sign on the door that said

“ DOCTOR FOX ”

She tried to peak through the key-hole, but there was a key on the inside. She listened and could just barely hear voices. So she knocked at the door. The door being made of snow, the knock made no sound.

THE LITTLE HOUSE OF SNOW

Then Mary Ellen remembered the charm. She opened it and read the words, "Go in." So she opened the door and walked in.

It had been so dark outside that the light in the room blinded her for a moment. Some one had been cooking, for Mary Ellen could smell something nice like chicken soup and cinnamon rolls. It reminded her that she was hungry. There was a roaring fire in the fireplace. It reminded her that she was cold.

"What a nice place," she thought.

And then — Her eyes became used to the light and she saw a fox, a real live fox, sitting in a big armchair beside the fire. Mary Ellen was terribly frightened, too frightened to move or think. She could only stand and gaze in terror at the fox.

He dropped his newspaper on his lap and looked at Mary Ellen over the tops of his spectacles.

"Mother," he cried, "come here."

"Maybe the mother will want to feed me to the baby foxes," thought Mary Ellen, as she tried to open the door. But she could not turn the knob. She tried to turn the key, but it would not turn.

Then another fox came into the room, stood right beside her, and said,

"Well, father! Of all things I never expected to see a real little girl here."

THE HOUSE OF THE RED FOX

The father fox saw that Mary Ellen was frightened, so he said,

"Do not be frightened, poor child. How did you ever get here?"

Mrs. Fox pulled a rocking-chair over beside the fire and told Mary Ellen to sit down.

"No wonder she was frightened," said Dr. Fox with a sigh.

His wife sighed, too, and they both looked very sad. They seemed so kind that Mary Ellen did not want them to feel sad. So she sat down in the little chair and said in a trembling voice,

"I am not frightened—very much."

The heat of the fire made her feel faint and dizzy. She closed her eyes and moaned. The next thing she knew, Mrs. Fox had taken off her cold wet clothes and wrapped her in a big warm blanket. Dr. Fox felt her pulse and looked at her tongue.

"She is cold and hungry," he said. "Bring her some of that hot chicken soup and some cinnamon rolls."

After she had eaten, Mary Ellen began to feel better.

"We have a bed that will just fit you," said Mrs. Fox.

She went into the next room and brought out sheets and blankets which she warmed at the fire. Mary Ellen was too sleepy to

THE LITTLE HOUSE OF SNOW

wonder at all the strange things that were happening. When the sheets were warm Mrs. Fox made up the bed and put Mary Ellen in it.

Mary Ellen felt so grateful that she put her arms around Mrs. Fox's neck and hugged her. Then she turned over and went to sleep.

Mrs. Fox went back to the other room and sat down beside the doctor. He took his pipe out of his mouth, wiped his spectacles, and said in a sad voice,

"She is a nice little girl, mother. We must be good to her."

"Yes," said Mrs. Fox. "We will keep her here and be good to her for the sake of——"

Mrs. Fox could say no more, but began to cry, softly and quietly, but oh, so sadly.

Dr. Fox patted her on the shoulder and said,

"There, there. Everything will turn out right after a while."

But he, too, had to take off his spectacles again to wipe his eyes. Then they sat for a long time in silence,—Dr. Fox puffing away at his pipe and Mrs. Fox softly weeping.

CHAPTER VI

MARY ELLEN'S NEW HOME

IT was late the next morning when Mary Ellen awoke. She could hear some one moving around in the next room and she wondered if all that she remembered of the night before had really happened or was only a dream. She slid softly out of bed and crept ever so softly to the door. She tried to open it without making a noise. But the door creaked and Mrs. Fox turned and saw her.

"Good-morning," she said. "Have you had enough sleep?"

"Yes, ma'am," said Mary Ellen. "Where are my clothes?"

"Here they are, warm and dry. Come out and dress by the fire."

As Mary Ellen was used to doing everything for herself it was almost like having a real mother when Mrs. Fox buttoned her dress, tied her shoes, brushed her hair, and brought warm water for her to wash.

"Father and I had breakfast long ago," said Mrs. Fox, "so you can just eat at this little table."

MARY ELLEN'S NEW HOME

So she boiled a nice fresh egg, warmed a bowl of milk, and took some hot rolls out of the oven. Then she set the little table and placed it beside the window.

Looking out of the window Mary Ellen saw that the house was in a big, thick forest. There was no path or road anywhere in sight, but there were the tracks of a great many animals in the snow. The trees were bare of leaves, but the heavy snow-storm had clothed them and they now sparkled beautifully in the morning sun. The ground in front of the house sloped down to the narrow river which was frozen as smooth and hard as glass.

As Mary Ellen was eating her breakfast and looking out of the window she saw a little brown animal come running up the slope.

"That looks like the picture of a beaver in my reader," she said to Mrs. Fox.

Mrs. Fox went over to the window and looked out.

"That is little Tommy Beaver," she said. "I suppose he is coming for the doctor."

She opened the door and Tommy Beaver came in.

"Oh, where is the doctor?" he said. "My father has hurt his foot. It got caught in a trap and he pulled it out."

Mary Ellen shuddered.

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"The doctor is at the gray squirrel's," said Mrs. Fox. "You may meet him coming back. Go by the Big Rabbit-hole. One of the rabbit children was not feeling well yesterday and he may have stopped there."

At noon when the doctor came home for his dinner Mrs. Fox asked him if he had seen Tommy Beaver.

"Yes," said Dr. Fox, "I just came from there. His father's foot was not very bad this time. The river is just full of beaver traps. It is a wonder that more of the little fellows are not caught. They have to keep a pretty good watch out for them."

"How is the rabbit baby?" asked Mrs. Fox. The doctor shook his head.

"Pretty bad," he said. "She never was strong, poor little thing, and this cold snap has about done her up. It is going to be colder to-night, too."

"Well then you had better bring in some wood," said his wife.

"Can I do anything to help you?" asked Mary Ellen as she thought she had been sitting around idle long enough and ought to help the kind doctor and his wife.

The doctor told her she could gather twigs and small branches while he chopped the big logs. So they went out together.

When she had gathered quite a little bundle



MARY ELLEN WIPED THE DISHES FOR MRS. FOX

MARY ELLEN'S NEW HOME

of twigs, Mary Ellen went back to the house and wiped the dinner dishes for Mrs. Fox. Dr. Fox smoked a pipe before he started on his rounds and both he and his wife talked to Mary Ellen just as if she were their own little girl.

In the evening after supper they all sat around the fire again. Mrs. Fox sewed on a little dress she had started for Mary Ellen and told her all about the animal people in the forest around them. Dr. Fox read the paper, smoked his pipe and told jokes. Altogether they were like a happy little family.

As Mrs. Fox tucked her in bed, Mary Ellen hugged her again and said,

"I never was so happy in my life. You are like a real mother and this is like a real home."

When Mrs. Fox went back to the other room she told the doctor what Mary Ellen had said.

"Oh, dear," she cried, "it makes me think so much of our own ——"

"There, there, mother," said Dr. Fox. "Do not worry. Everything will turn out all right, I am sure."

CHAPTER VII

FOREST FRIENDS

THE next morning Mary Ellen was up bright and early. Mrs. Fox was going to market, so the doctor waited until she was ready, as the Rabbit's Hole lay in the same direction.

When they had gone Mary Ellen washed the dishes, swept the floor and straightened up the kitchen so as to surprise Mrs. Fox when she came home. She sang happily as she worked. This was just like "playing house" after the hard work she had done in her aunt's house.

She was in her bedroom, making up her bed, when she heard a tap on the window-pane. Turning, she saw a squirrel sitting outside on the sill, wildly waving her beautiful tail and chattering as if she were excited. Mary Ellen raised the window and let her in.

"Oh," said the squirrel, "I tried to get in the front way, but I could not make you hear. Where is the doctor?"

"I do not know where he is by this time,"

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said Mary Ellen. "He started for the Rabbit's Hole."

"I stopped there on my way over," said the squirrel, "and they told me he had gone. What shall I do?"

"What has happened?" asked Mary Ellen in great alarm.

"My poor husband," said the squirrel, "slipped and fell from a very high branch. He hurt himself so badly he cannot move and he is lying out there freezing to death."

"That is dreadful," said Mary Ellen. "Perhaps I could carry him here and keep him warm until the doctor comes."

"If you only would," said the squirrel with tears in her sweet little eyes.

So Mary Ellen bundled up very warmly and went off with the squirrel. The poor squirrel was so anxious that she ran and leaped ahead until Mary Ellen was breathless trying to keep up with her. When they reached the injured squirrel the poor little fellow was stiff with the cold. Mary Ellen took him up gently and held him close to her own body to keep him warm as they went back to the little house of snow.

There, Mary Ellen did for the squirrel very much what Mrs. Fox had done for her the night she arrived. She rubbed and rubbed until the poor little squirrel ached all over.

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But the doctor had told Mary Ellen that that was the best way to get the warm red blood running through the body. So she kept right on. She made him drink hot milk and then wrapped him in a warm little blanket and held him in her arms near the fire. He was sleeping quite comfortably when the doctor came home in the evening.

It was so terribly cold by this time that Mrs. Fox would not let him go home. So the two squirrels cuddled into the big armchair and stayed all night.

Mary Ellen had been staying at the little house of snow only a few days before she knew almost all of the animals in the neighbourhood. One day she saw a hare with his foot caught in a trap. The poor hare was afraid of human beings, and was terribly frightened when he saw Mary Ellen going towards him. But when she spoke to him kindly and gently he knew that she must be the little girl who was staying at the doctor's house. He asked her to try to free his foot. Mary Ellen fussed and worked at it until her fingers were numb with cold. At last she set the hare free with no worse results than a sore, stiff foot. He never forgot this kindness. All the animals heard how Mary Ellen had freed the hare and rescued the squirrel and loved her for it.

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Another day Tommy Beaver came running up to the house.

"My mother got caught in a trap," he said. "I came to see if Mary Ellen would set her free."

"Where is the trap?" asked Mrs. Fox.

"At the first curve in the river," said Tommy.

"In the water?" asked Mrs. Fox.

"Yes," said Tommy.

"I could not let Mary Ellen get in the water," said Mrs. Fox. "She might catch a terrible cold. I shall go myself."

Tommy was afraid Mrs. Fox would not know how as well as Mary Ellen. He ran down the slope and jumped in the river and swam along close to the bank. Mrs. Fox and Mary Ellen walked along near him. Tommy was a fast swimmer and had to stop and go back every little while as he did not want to get too far ahead of them.

When they came to the first turn in the river they could see Tommy's mother watching anxiously for them. Mrs. Fox jumped into the river and tried to find the spring of the trap. She worked at it until Tommy's mother cried with discouragement.

Then Mary Ellen, who had been running up and down on the bank trying to keep warm, insisted on stepping into the river to

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see what she could do to help. The water was icy and Mary Ellen screamed when she put her foot into it. But she did not turn back. She held the trap while Mrs. Fox pushed the spring and in a few moments Mrs. Beaver was free.

Mrs. Fox and Mary Ellen ran home as fast as they could to get warm and dry. Now Mary Ellen had three good friends,—the hare, the squirrel, and the beaver.

All the animals in this forest seemed gentle and timid. The hare showed Mary Ellen where he lived under a clump of evergreen bushes. The bushes were so thick and close that the snow did not get to the long, brown grass and dry leaves underneath. It was a soft warm bed for the hare and his family.

When Mary Ellen was out gathering twigs and fire-wood she often wandered in the direction of the hare's home to see him and his sturdy children.

Dr. Fox took her to see the rabbit children and she became quite fond of the dear little things. When the poor little rabbit baby died Mary Ellen made a nice little grave and buried her.

She knew the particular tree where the gray squirrel lived, but his nest was in a hole too high up for her to reach it.

The only animal she feared was the old

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wolf. He came to the little house of snow one night, opened the door, and walked in. He looked so thin and wild and hungry that Mary Ellen was frightened and ran over to sit beside Dr. Fox.

The old wolf laughed when he saw she was frightened.

"A nice, sweet little girl," he said in a gruff voice. "I could eat her up." Then he laughed again.

"Don't tease the child," said the doctor sternly. "What do you wish here?"

"My old wound is hurting me," he said. "I think I must have caught cold in it."

The doctor looked at the old shot wound and put some medicine on it. The old wolf looked so hungry that Mrs. Fox brought out good meat and fed him.

"May I lie before the fire and rest and get warm before I go?" asked the old wolf.

They were too kind to refuse him, so the old wolf stretched out before the fire and fell asleep. Then the doctor and his wife did not have the heart to waken him and send him out in the cold. So he slept there all night. Mrs. Fox pulled Mary Ellen's little bed into her own room and locked the door.

"Now," she said, "you can sleep in peace. You will know that I am right beside you and need not worry about the old wolf."

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Mary Ellen hugged her again and fell asleep without any fear of the old wolf.

Mrs. Fox went back to the doctor and said :

“I am glad we took that dear child in. But, oh, she does make me think so much of our own ——”

“There, there, mother,” said the doctor, “everything will turn out for the best in the end.”

CHAPTER VIII

STORY OF THE FOXES

MARY ELLEN knew that there must be men in the forest to set the traps, but she liked the forest folk so well that she had no wish to go back to people of her own kind.

One day when she had been to see the rabbit children, she was hurrying home in the twilight, afraid she would be late for supper. She almost ran into two men with guns over their shoulders. She saw them just in time to jump behind a tree.

"What was that?" cried one of them, raising his gun to shoot.

"Your own shadow," said the other, laughing.

"No, it was not," his companion replied. "I am sure something jumped right in front of us. I am going to shoot in that direction anyhow, just to see if there is anything there."

Poor Mary Ellen. Her heart beat wildly with fright, but she dared not move.

"I know how the poor little animals feel

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now," she thought, as she crouched behind the tree in fear and trembling.

"Do not waste your shot," said the second man. "You could not hit anything. No use shooting at shadows."

His companion put up his gun and they walked on. When they were out of sight Mary Ellen was so stiff with fright and the crouching that she could hardly walk.

A few nights later Dr. Fox was reading one of his big medicine books and Mary Ellen was pulling the bastings out of the dress Mrs. Fox had made for her. They heard some one whistling near by in the forest. It was such a merry, happy-go-lucky whistle and it had been such a long time since Mary Ellen heard that sound that she was quite delighted. She ran to the window and peaked beneath the curtain.

The moon was shining brightly and making a pathway of silver on the snow. Away, 'way down near the river, right where the moonlight shone most strongly, Mary Ellen saw,—the Red-haired Boy.

"Oh," she cried in great excitement, "look, look. There is the Red-haired Boy."

The doctor and his wife jumped up.

"Where," they cried, "oh, where?"

Mary Ellen followed them as they ran to open the door, and all three tried to crowd

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through at once. When they got outside the Red-haired Boy was nowhere in sight. They ran down the slope and looked in every direction. But he had disappeared.

When they went back to the house Mrs. Fox lifted the corner of her apron to wipe the tears from her eyes. Again Dr. Fox patted her on the shoulder and said,

"There, there, mother, do not cry. I am sure things will turn out all right."

It grieved Mary Ellen to see that the doctor and his wife had a secret trouble. They had been just like the best and kindest father and mother in the world and had always tried to be bright and cheerful when Mary Ellen was around so that she would be happy. But she had not been with them long before she knew that there was some secret trouble which made them both very unhappy.

"Dear Mother Fox," she said, "tell me what it is that makes you so sad. You have been so good to me. Is there nothing I can do for you?"

The doctor looked at his wife and his wife looked at him.

"Tell her," said the doctor. "I am sure we can trust her with our secret."

So Mrs. Fox began.

"Well," she said, "there is a great deal more to our story than I can tell you. But the

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principal thing is that we have a son and daughter who are human like you. We are kept away from them and dare not go near them. Now our daughter is very ill and we are afraid she will die."

"Oh," said Mary Ellen, "cannot the doctor cure her?"

"I could cure her quickly enough," said the doctor, "if I could only go to her. But she is a princess now and they will not let me near her."

"You see," went on Mrs. Fox, "she is the Princess of the Snow and lives in a castle of ice. All the people she lives with are snow people and she is freezing to death, because they do not know what to do to keep her warm and well. Oh, if I could only go to her I would nurse her and take such good care of her that she would be well very soon."

"If I could only go to her," sighed the doctor. "I would soon have her well and strong as she used to be."

Mary Ellen felt so sorry for the poor princess that she could hardly sleep all night. She kept wishing she could do something and wondering if she could not help in some way.

In the morning she had a great idea. She jumped out of bed and ran out to the kitchen when the doctor and his wife were eating breakfast.

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“Could I go to the princess?” she cried.

“What?” said the doctor and his wife in great surprise.

“Oh,” said Mary Ellen, “I have been thinking about the princess all night. And I thought that if I could go to her the doctor could tell me just what to do and I would try so hard to cure her.”

Again the doctor and his wife looked at one another. The doctor shook his head.

“Dear little girl,” he said, “we could not let you go. It would be too dangerous. If anything should happen to you we could never forgive ourselves.”

“I would not be afraid,” said Mary Ellen. “Oh, if you think I could do any good, please, please let me go.”

For a long time the doctor and his wife would not consent to her going as they were afraid that something might happen to her. But Mary Ellen was so anxious to do something to return their kindness to her that she coaxed and begged until at last they said she might go.

CHAPTER IX

MARY ELLEN'S JOURNEY

THE next morning the Fox household was up bright and early for there was a great deal of work to do. Right after breakfast, Mrs. Fox opened a big chest and took from it a bolt of striped goods, blue and white, such as nurses' dresses are made of. She cut and fitted and sewed all day, making two little nurse dresses for Mary Ellen.

The doctor and Mary Ellen went into the forest to find roots and herbs to make medicine for the princess. They dug down into the ground and gathered roots of bushes. They cut the root of a tree. They plucked the dry leaves of one plant and gathered the dead leaves of another. They brushed the snow away and found some hardy weeds that had withstood the frost and cold. All these they put into a little basket and took home with them.

Mrs. Fox took out every sauce-pan and kettle in the little house and made up a blazing fire. Then the doctor put the medicines on to boil and steep. When they were done he

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set them outside to cool while he went off to see his patients.

When the medicines had cooled Mary Ellen took seven little bottles out of the doctor's medicine chest and filled them with seven different kinds of medicine, just as the doctor had told her to do.

All day Mrs. Fox sewed busily and when evening came she had finished two little caps, two little dresses, and two little white aprons for Mary Ellen. While Mrs. Fox was getting the supper Mary Ellen pulled the bastings out so that they would be all ready.

After supper Dr. Fox got a little old satchel of his and packed the bottles in so that they would not break. Mrs. Fox put the caps, dresses and aprons in on top, and all was ready.

"Don't you think I ought to start to-night?" said Mary Ellen. "If the princess is so ill she may get worse and I do not want to get there so late."

"That is true," said the doctor. "The sooner you get there the better it will be. It is a long journey, too. Even if we start to-night it will be late to-morrow when we get there."

So it seemed best to start at once. Mary Ellen put on the warm blue coat that Mrs. Fox had given her and said "Good-bye" to

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the little house of snow where she had been so happy. She cried a little as she hugged Mrs. Fox for she did not know how long it might be before she would see her again.

"Come back to us, Mary Ellen," said Mrs. Fox, with tears in her eyes. "Come back to us when the princess is strong and well."

The chopping-bowl, which had been stored away all this time, now came in very handy. The doctor had made a sort of rope harness to go around his neck and shoulders and fasten to the chopping-bowl. Mary Ellen got into the bowl, took the satchel from Mrs. Fox, and the doctor started off. He did not go at his greatest speed, but he kept up a sure, steady, fast trot that left many miles behind them before morning.

Mary Ellen had made up her mind to stay awake, but even as she was thinking about it she fell asleep. When it grew light and she awoke, they were in a part of the forest which she had never seen before. She asked the doctor how far they had come and where they were, but he was so tired and worn out he could not speak.

Tired as he was in the morning after traveling all night, he did not stop to rest. When evening came he was a hundred times more tired than in the morning, but they were now so near to the castle of ice and the sick

MARY ELLEN'S JOURNEY

princess, that he would not rest until they were in sight of the place.

Just as night fell he stopped on the top of a hill. Away, 'way down in the valley below, Mary Ellen could see an immense white castle enclosed by a great white wall. Dr. Fox pointed at the place and Mary Ellen understood. He gravely shook hands with her, too weak and weary to say "Good-bye." As Mary Ellen started down the hill towards the castle, the poor fox laid down under a tree and fell asleep. There in the cold he slept until morning, too tired to move. When morning came, he looked at the castle where the princess lay sick and perhaps dying, and wondered if Mary Ellen had got there safely. He dared not go any nearer, so he turned and started for home.

CHAPTER X

OUTSIDE THE CASTLE

WHEN Mary Ellen left the doctor she walked quickly down the hill, glad that her journey was almost at an end. The doctor and Mrs. Fox had told her there would be danger, but somehow she did not feel afraid.

"I shall go right up to the entrance," she said to herself, "and tell them I have come to nurse the princess. I am sure they will be glad to let me in then."

As she drew nearer she saw that the big wall was built like a fort with windows high up all the way around. There were lights inside and Mary Ellen saw that a soldier was posted at each window. Each soldier had a gun in his hands which he rested on the window sill and pointed at the outer world.

The wall formed a circle and Mary Ellen spent a long time walking around it trying to find the entrance. She could find nothing that looked like a door or gate so she stood under one of the windows and called to the soldier.

OUTSIDE THE CASTLE

“How can I get in?”

Strange to say none of the soldiers had noticed her as she walked around the wall so at the sound of her voice below them, they all jumped. Those nearest her poked their heads out of the windows and stared.

Then! Pop, bang, pop!

A little hard, white bullet struck Mary Ellen's cheek; another struck her forehead; two more whizzed past her ear. Now she was frightened for she saw that there was danger. She ran as fast as she could and hid behind the nearest tree.

She felt her cheek and found that it was bruised a little. When she was struck by the bullet she thought that the shot had made a hole in her cheek. But there was only a sore spot where it had struck.

The soldiers kept on shooting and the bullets fell thick and fast around the tree where she was hiding. She reached out carefully and picked one up. It was nothing but a hailstone.

“Hailstones cannot kill me,” she said, “and I must get into the castle.”

So she covered her face with her hands and stepped bravely out.

Crack, crack, pop, bang! went the guns in the little windows, and the hailstone bullets struck Mary Ellen sharp, stinging little blows.

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They could hurt, even if they could not kill, and it took all her courage to keep from running back to hide behind the tree again.

When she got close up to the wall and directly underneath the windows, the bullets could not reach her and she sat down to rest and get her breath. She was quite sure there was no big gate or entrance, but she hoped that there might be some small opening in the wall through which she could creep. So she walked all around it once more. But there was no opening.

As the wall was of snow it seemed that the best thing to do, and in fact, the only thing to do, was to scrape a hole in it. So with the sharp end of a little stick, Mary Ellen set to work. It was a long, slow, cold task for the wall was very thick. Mary Ellen's arms ached and her fingers were numb with the cold before a hole appeared. Slowly the hole grew larger and larger until it was just big enough for her to crawl through.

She had put her head through and was trying to pull her body after, when a terrific BOOM! startled her. For a moment she thought that the castle had been roused and that the soldiers were firing a cannon. Mary Ellen was terribly frightened and her heart beat so wildly that she thought she would smother. But it was only the big clock in

OUTSIDE THE CASTLE

the tower of the castle striking nine o'clock. As the ninth stroke died away, she cautiously pulled herself through the hole.

Just as she had supposed, the wall was built for a fortress. Mary Ellen found herself in the lower room with not a soul in sight. She could find neither a door nor window and she wondered if she would have to make another hole to get into the yard of the castle. There was a flight of stairs going to the room above and Mary Ellen thought she would go up and see if there was any way of getting into the yard from above.

She went up the stairs very quietly and opened the door at the top softly and noiselessly. She opened it the tiniest crack, just enough to show her that the upper room was the one with the windows.

She saw all the soldiers, each one standing at his window with his gun in his hands. They were all peering out, watching anxiously for the enemy. Mary Ellen waited a moment and none of them turned towards her. Then she decided to take a great risk.

She stepped into the room without making a sound, and stole over to another door. She opened this door and stepped out of the room. Not a soldier had seen or heard her.

She now found herself at the top of stairs that led down into the yard of the castle.

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There were soldiers pacing up and down with guns and bayonets on their shoulders. The moon was shining so brightly on the snow-covered ground and showed everything up so plainly that Mary Ellen thought she never could get across the courtyard without being caught.

Keeping very close to the wall and crouching low down, she crept to the bottom of the stairs. She waited there, hoping that the nearest soldiers might get further away. A little group of four stood quite close to her and she could hear them talking in whispers. At last one of them said,

“Well, we must get back to business.”

Mary Ellen got ready to run across the courtyard as soon as their backs should be turned. Three of them did turn and walk away, but the fourth came straight towards her and started up the stairs. Of course he saw Mary Ellen crouching there.

“Ah,” he exclaimed, and stabbed at her with his bayonet.

Mary Ellen threw out her arm to protect herself and the bayonet cut her fingers. The soldier struck at her again, and again she threw out her arm. This time her hand struck the soldier on the head. To her surprise and horror his head rolled off. Feeling very sorry for what she had done, Mary Ellen

OUTSIDE THE CASTLE

picked the poor soldier up and discovered that he was made of snow and that his head was only a snow ball. The bayonet was nothing but a strong, sharp icicle. She felt sorry that she had hurt the soldier, but it was not so bad as if he had been made of flesh and blood.

All the soldiers had their backs turned now and Mary Ellen could not waste any more time on the soldier she had killed. Right opposite the stairs was what seemed to be a small, low door in the castle. She ran for this.

When she reached it she found that it was not a door, but was a small opening into a dark passage. Mary Ellen hated to go in, but it seemed the only way to get into the castle. She went to the end of the passage and by feeling around she found that there were steps leading both up and down. She tried the steps that went up first. There was a door at the top which was chained and bolted. As she did not want to knock, Mary Ellen decided to try the stairs that went down.

When she opened the door at the bottom of the stairs going down, she found herself in an immense cellar. There were four lanterns hanging from the ceiling in the four corners, and although they did not shed much light, the cellar was more pleasant than the dark passage. Mary Ellen saw that the cellar was

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divided into bins. Some of the bins were filled with potatoes and apples ; others with coal. Some had tables on which were jars of fruit and bottles of wine.

She picked her way between these bins and found a ladder. She went up and peaked through the key-hole of the door at the top. She could not see any one and when she listened she could not hear any one, so she opened the door and stepped inside.

CHAPTER XI

INSIDE THE CASTLE

JUST as she had expected, she found herself in the kitchen of the castle.

There was a fine fire in the big stove, and, although there were several pans and kettles on the top, no one was tending them.

In all the excitement Mary Ellen had forgotten about being tired and cold and hungry. The fire and the pans and kettles reminded her. She cut a piece of bread from the loaf, stuck it on a big fork, and toasted it at the fire, at the same time getting nice and warm. One of the kettles was filled with steaming hot tomato soup. Mary Ellen dipped some into a bowl to eat with her toast and had a nice little meal.

She had just finished eating and was resting comfortably by the fire, when she heard some one touch the knob of the door. She jumped into a cupboard.

Through a crack in the door she could see a young woman dressed as a maid, in a black

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dress with a Frenchy little white apron and a Frenchy white cap.

The maid had a tray on which were several empty dishes which she proceeded to fill from the kettles on the stove.

"Oh," said Mary Ellen as she watched her, "maybe she is going to take some supper to the princess. I shall get out and follow her. When I find the princess all my troubles will be over."

Just then the maid began to talk out loud, counting over the things she had placed on the tray.

"Let me see," she said. "Soup, toast, custard pudding, milk, sugar. Oh, I must fill this salt dip. I believe the cook keeps the salt in this cupboard."

And she started towards the cupboard where Mary Ellen was hiding.

All in a flash Mary Ellen decided that it would never do to be caught hiding in the cupboard this way.

"The only thing to do is to scare her," she said to herself.

So when the maid opened the cupboard, before she could see what was inside, Mary Ellen threw a couple of dishes out with a great clatter and jumped over the maid's shoulder.

The maid screamed, threw her apron over her face, and ran from the room.

INSIDE THE CASTLE

"Ghosts," she cried. "Mice, ghosts. Oh, save me."

Mary Ellen laughed as she hid behind the stove. Then she heard people coming, and as she did not want to be seen until she had reached the princess, she went out of the kitchen as fast as she could.

The door she opened led into a beautiful dining-room. The table was all set, and as Mary Ellen went in by the door at one end of the room, several people entered by the door at the other end. The table was between Mary Ellen and the party, so she dropped to the floor and crept over until she was under the table and hidden by the long cloth.

Seven people came in and took their places. They all talked and laughed except one, a young man who sat next to the head.

The old woman who sat at the foot said to him,

"Why are you so silent? Are you worrying about the princess?"

"Yes," he said. "I am. Nothing seems to do her any good. She grows weaker every hour."

"Do not worry," said the old woman. "She will be better after a while."

Mary Ellen thought the meal would never end. Once some one kicked her and she thought she would surely be discovered.

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"Whose foot is this I am kicking?" asked the man, kicking again. "It takes up the whole dining-room."

Everybody laughed and took his remark as a joke so Mary Ellen was safe for a while. At last the man who was sad and silent spoke.

"I must ask you to excuse me," he said. "I must go up and see if my wife has everything she needs."

All the others rose with him and followed him out of the dining-room.

As soon as she dared, Mary Ellen crept from the shelter of the table-cloth and followed them. The big hall was empty and she went up-stairs without meeting a soul. Just as she reached the top she saw the sad man enter a room. He closed the door after him, but the door of the next room was open. Seeing that no one was in there, Mary Ellen went in.

It was a lovely little bedroom with a little white bed, a little white dressing-table, and two little white chairs. At the windows and over the bed and dressing-table there were blue and white striped curtains. The wall paper and the carpet were white with blue flowers.

"This room just matches my nurse dresses,"

INSIDE THE CASTLE

said Mary Ellen, "so I shall sleep here to-night unless some one comes and puts me out. Maybe if I stay the princess will let me keep this for my room."

CHAPTER XII

THE PRINCESS

THE door between the blue-and-white room and the princess' bedroom was open. Mary Ellen could see the sad prince standing beside the bed looking down at the princess.

He stood there such a long time, giving no sign of leaving, that Mary Ellen had plenty of time for looking around. She dared not go in while he was there even though he looked so kind. For the Foxes had warned her against taking such risks until she had given the princess the contents of the first bottle.

As she looked around her little room she saw herself in the mirror over the dressing-table, and was shocked to see how dirty she looked. Her face was bruised and dirty from the hailstone bullets, her coat was wet from the snow and dusty from the cellar.

There was a little bath-room on the other side of the blue and white room, so Mary Ellen went in and took a bath. When she had brushed her hair and braided it neatly and

THE PRINCESS

put on one of her nice, clean nurse dresses, the mirror showed her quite a different looking little girl.

The prince had gone now so Mary Ellen went into the other bedroom.

There she saw a most beautiful princess with hair of red gold and a white, white face, lying in the bed.

"I am so cold, so cold," the princess was murmuring. "I shall never be warm again."

Mary Ellen took the first bottle from her satchel. On this bottle the doctor had pasted a piece of paper which read :

"TO MAKE HER WARM"

Mary Ellen took a spoonful of this medicine and gave it to the princess. Then she went back into the blue-and-white room, got into the bed and fell asleep. No matter what trouble might lie before her she felt happy to think that she had reached the princess and given her the contents of one bottle anyhow.

The next morning Mary Ellen was the first one in the whole castle to wake up. She put on her dress, cap and apron and went into the other room.

The princess opened her eyes as Mary Ellen entered. She was too weak to show surprise. Mary Ellen took her hand and said :

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“I have come to nurse you and make you well.”

Then she smoothed the pillow and rubbed the princess' hands to make them warm. The doctor had told her not to talk much to the princess at first so Mary Ellen moved around and worked in silence.

While she was sitting beside the bed rubbing the princess' hands, the sad prince came into the room. The princess saw that he was surprised at seeing a stranger there beside her so early in the morning, so she roused herself enough to say,

“This little girl has come to nurse me and make me well. She has given me medicine already that has made me warm. Now if I could only sleep.”

“To-night,” said Mary Ellen, “I shall give you medicine that will make you sleep.”

The sad prince was only too glad to have some one to help his wife so he gave orders that no one was to interfere with Mary Ellen.

And no one did interfere,—except one person.



THE HANDS OF THE SNOW QUEEN WERE LIKE ICE



CHAPTER XIII

THE OLD QUEEN

IN the morning, after breakfast, the old queen, the mother of the sad prince, came up and asked for the princess.

She spoke so kindly and sweetly that Mary Ellen thought her a most lovable old lady.

“My dear daughter-in-law,” said the old queen, sitting down beside the bed and taking the princess’ hand, “I have come to visit with you a little this morning.”

For the first time in all her illness, the princess was feeling warm and comfortable. But when the snow queen had been holding her hands for about fifteen minutes she began to tremble with the cold. For the hands of the snow queen were like ice.

Like the good little nurse that she was, Mary Ellen ran for the hot water bag when she saw that the princess was chilled. She put hot flat-irons in the bed and gave the princess the rest of the medicine in the bottle that said, “to make her warm.”

Now, when the old queen saw how quickly the medicine in the little bottle warmed and

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helped the princess, she asked Mary Ellen where she got it. Mary Ellen told her about the medicine in the seven bottles that she had brought in her little satchel.

The old queen went into the little blue-and-white room. When Mary Ellen followed her she saw the old queen with the satchel in her hands, trying to open it. As Mary Ellen entered the room she dropped the satchel.

The poor little nurse screamed because she thought that all the bottles must be broken and that she never could cure the princess now. But somehow not one bottle broke. So that night Mary Ellen gave the princess medicine.

TO MAKE HER SLEEP

She slept all night and in the morning was rested as well as warm. The sad prince was quite happy when he saw his wife so much better.

On the second day when the old queen came up the princess kept her hands under the quilt so that she could not hold them. Mary Ellen had put her satchel away for safe keeping, but the old queen went into the blue-and-white room and hunted around until she found it. When Mary Ellen missed the satchel from its hiding place she was greatly excited. She ran to tell the prince.

THE OLD QUEEN

"All my medicine is gone," she cried. "Oh, how can I ever cure the princess if I do not find it."

The prince was wild at the thought and gave orders that the castle should be hunted high and low. The servants were all called into the hall of the castle and questioned. No one knew anything about the satchel.

Then they started at the attic and searched all the way down to the cellar. But the satchel was nowhere to be found. At last, just as they had given up and the princess was growing quite weak, one of the stable boys came in with the satchel in his hand. He had found it in a corner of the stable-yard.

When the old queen saw the satchel she flew into a rage and boxed the ears of the maid who was standing nearest her.

"I told you to burn it and break the bottles," she cried to the great surprise of every one. "Why did you disobey me?"

The poor maid began to cry and sobbed out the whole story.

The queen had given her the satchel to burn, but she had laid it down in the yard for a moment while she talked to one of the soldiers. Then she had forgotten all about it.

"Why did you do this, mother?" asked the prince, sternly.

"Those medicines contain poison," said the

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old queen. "They will make the princess better for a few days and then she will get worse and die."

"O do not believe her," cried Mary Ellen. "A good and wise doctor who loves the princess sent those medicines to make her well."

The prince hardly knew what to think. He did not like to doubt his own mother, but still he was angry at her because she had been so sly. As the princess had great faith in Mary Ellen and the medicines, the prince finally told her to stay and to do what she could to cure his wife.

That night Mary Ellen gave the princess the medicine

TO MAKE HER EAT

Then she put the bottles in a locked chest. She put the key of this chest on a string which she tied around her neck, so the old queen could do no more to interfere with her.

CHAPTER XIV

HAPPY DAYS

ON the fourth day, when the princess had taken the medicine

TO MAKE HER STRONG

she asked Mary Ellen where she had come from. Mary Ellen told her the whole story from the beginning, all about the little old lady, the enchanted chopping-bowl, and Dr. and Mrs. Fox.

"The Foxes were so good and kind to me," said Mary Ellen. "They could not have been nicer to me if I had been their own little girl. When they heard that you were ill they felt terribly because they love you very much."

"How strange," said the princess. "I wonder where they heard of me."

Now Mary Ellen said no more because the doctor had warned her not to let the princess know that he was her father and Mrs. Fox her mother.

"If she knew that we had been changed

THE HOUSE OF THE RED FOX

into animals," he had said, "she would feel so badly that all the medicine in the world would not cure her."

The princess thought about it a long while and finally said,

"Perhaps some of the poor I have helped told them about me and they wanted to help me on that account."

Mary Ellen kept silent.

It was just wonderful to see how quickly the princess improved under Mary Ellen's care. Each bottle of medicine did just what it was supposed to do. On the fifth day the princess took the medicine

TO MAKE HER SIT UP

on the sixth day the medicine

TO MAKE HER WALK

and on the seventh day she drank the contents of the last bottle,

TO MAKE HER ALL WELL AGAIN

But even though she was well and strong again, the princess did not care to feast and dance as the others in the castle did. She and Mary Ellen used to sit at the window of her chamber every morning and watch the

HAPPY DAYS

prince drilling the soldiers in the courtyard below. When the drilling hour was up the prince would have the soldiers salute the princess. Then he would come in and have luncheon alone with the princess and Mary Ellen.

The king, queen and all the lords and ladies ate together in the big dining-room down-stairs. But no matter how grand a feast they had, the happiest little party was upstairs. The maid would bring good things up on the tray, the princess would make tea in a little kettle over the fireplace and Mary Ellen would toast bread.

The evenings were the most pleasant of all. The prince with his arm around his dear wife and her head on his shoulder would sit before the fire talking and chatting. Mary Ellen, with the baby in her arms, would sing softly and sweetly. From below would come the sound of music, dancing and laughter.

"How much happier we are than they," the prince would say. "This is the only home-like room in the castle."

But these good times were not to last forever. One day the baby was cross and restless.

"I believe he needs some fresh air," said the princess. "He is partly a snow baby,

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you know. I think this room is kept too hot for him and the cold air would do him good."

So Mary Ellen bundled up warmly and took the baby out into the courtyard. When the queen saw Mary Ellen rolling the baby in his go-cart around the castle she went out to speak to her.

"The king and the prince will soon be coming home from the hunt," said the old queen. "Let us go to meet them. My son will be so pleased to think that you brought the baby to meet him."

Mary Ellen followed the queen into the fort and the soldiers opened a door for them to pass through. As soon as they passed through, the door swung back and left a blank wall behind them without a crack or line to show where the door was.

The queen and Mary Ellen had only walked a little way when the queen said :

"Oh, I forgot something. Wait here."

She ran back and the soldiers opened the door to let her in.

The road before the castle was smooth and slippery. While waiting for the queen Mary Ellen had a good time rolling the go-cart along and sliding after it. The baby crowed and laughed and had a fine time too.

After a while the big clock in the tower

HAPPY DAYS

struck three. Then Mary Ellen began to wonder what could be keeping the queen. When the clock struck four she decided to go in and see what had happened.

CHAPTER XV

THE FRIENDLY GOAT

SHE could not find a door or opening in the wall of the fort, so she called to the soldiers.

“Let me in, please,” she cried, standing under one of the little high windows.

To her great surprise the little snow soldier popped his head up, stuck his gun out of the window, and shot a hailstone bullet at her.

Mary Ellen was hurt and angry. But she had been through so much trouble and danger that she was not easily frightened or discouraged. She ran around to the other side of the castle and stood under one of the little windows there. Again a little soldier popped his head up, stuck his gun out, and shot at her.

One of the bullets struck her on the cheek, very close to the eye. Mary Ellen almost cried it hurt so badly, but she suddenly remembered the baby that was in her charge out there in the cold with night coming on

THE FRIENDLY GOAT

and had no time for crying. Courage and thought were the only things that could help her.

"I believe the old queen has shut us out of the castle," she said to herself, "so there is no use in trying to get the soldiers to let us in."

The baby started to cry when his supper time came and no one gave him any supper. Mary Ellen rolled the go-cart into the forest a little ways and hid it among some thick trees and bushes. Then she got a sharp stick and tried to scrape a hole in the castle wall as she had done once before. But the snow people were not to be caught in that way again and they had frozen the lower part of the wall into solid ice. Mary Ellen worked and scraped and chipped at it for an hour without making even a tiny hole. At last she gave up and went back to the baby.

The little prince was still crying for his supper, and there beside the go-cart was an old goat watching him.

Mary Ellen had talked a good deal with wild animals, but never with a goat. This goat, however, had roamed about the forest so much and talked to so many animals that Mary Ellen had no trouble in understanding her.

"How this baby does cry," said the goat. "What is the matter with the poor child?"

THE HOUSE OF THE RED FOX

She seemed to be such a nice old goat and so friendly that in a few moments Mary Ellen was telling her all her troubles.

"This is a little prince," she said. "His father and mother live in that castle. His grandmother, the old queen, does not like the baby because his mother is a real woman and not made of snow. I think the old queen must have given orders that the baby and I are not to be let in the castle, because the soldiers shoot at me whenever they catch sight of me. The poor baby is so hungry and I am so cold I do not know what we ever shall do."

"Do not worry," said the old goat. "I will stay with you and help take care of the baby. There is an old hut near here and you had better spend the night there. I shall watch and see that no harm comes to you."

Mary Ellen pulled the go-cart out from beneath the bushes and followed the goat to the little hut.

The hut was very small and old, but when Mary Ellen opened the door, the moonlight showed that the floor was covered with clean thick hay that looked very soft and warm.

"This is better than having to sleep out in the forest, anyhow," said Mary Ellen, stepping inside.

At the same moment her foot struck some-

THE FRIENDLY GOAT

thing that moved. A voice cried out, "What is that?"

Mary Ellen was startled. Her heart stopped beating and for a moment she could not answer. She turned to the door, but the go-cart was blocking the way and the old goat was peering in over the top of it. So Mary Ellen turned to face the unknown enemy.

The enemy was sitting up now with the moonlight shining full upon his face and head. And that head was red!

Mary Ellen looked again and again. At last she was quite sure.

It was the Red-haired Boy.

CHAPTER XVI

ADVENTURES OF THE RED-HAIRED BOY

HE had been fast asleep in the hay and for a little while he thought he must still be dreaming.

"Is it really and truly you?" he said.

"Yes," said Mary Ellen.

"The little girl from down home who rode away in a chopping-bowl?"

"Yes," said Mary Ellen.

"Jiminy Christmas, jumping Jerusalem!" said the Red-haired Boy. "Who would ever have expected to meet you here?"

When they had got over their surprise, Mary Ellen pulled the go-cart into the hut and sat down to tell the Red-haired Boy her story. The goat lay with her head on Mary Ellen's lap and listened of her visit to the Foxes and of her nursing the princess.

The Red-haired Boy did not say a word until she had finished.

Then he said,

"Well, things do turn out queerly. Wait until you hear my story and see if you are not as surprised as I am at hearing yours."



THE RED-HAIRED BOY DID NOT SAY A WORD UNTIL SHE HAD
FINISHED

ADVENTURES OF THE RED-HAIRED BOY

So he began.

"In the first place my sister got married and went away. Early last winter my father and mother started out to visit her and never came back. I waited and waited, but they neither wrote to me nor came back. Then that night when I saw you speeding past in the chopping-bowl I ran after you. Of course you were out of sight in a few moments, but I followed in the track of the bowl. I could not understand what made the bowl go and I wanted to find out, so I followed all that night. Towards morning I came to an old barn and I was so tired I could go no farther. I slept there until noon the next day. I stopped at a big house in the afternoon and the cook gave me something to eat. Then I kept on and walked until evening, still following in the track of the chopping-bowl.

"There was no reason why I should go home since my father and mother were gone and somehow I felt as if I might find them by following the track of the chopping-bowl."

"Oh, did you find them?" asked Mary Ellen.

"No," said the Red-haired Boy sadly. "But I am beginning to hope I shall very soon now. Just wait until you hear everything. I followed the track for three days and then the snow began to melt and I lost it."

THE HOUSE OF THE RED FOX

"Where did you sleep and eat all this time?" asked Mary Ellen.

"Any place and every place," answered the Red-haired Boy. "I walked all the second night without coming to a house or shelter of any kind. When morning came I was so tired that I just laid down in the open field and fell asleep. I pulled grass and weeds and as much hay as I could get together and made quite a comfortable bed. It was not so bad while the sun was shining, but as soon as evening came on the cold woke me and I started on again. I had had nothing to eat all day and was pretty hungry. I walked all night and about four in the morning, just as the darkness was beginning to turn gray, I came to a house. There was a fine big barn in the back and I thought I would go in there and wait until the folks woke and see if they would give me something to eat.

"The barn door was locked and I had a hard time getting in. There was a window that was open, but it was too high for me to reach. I found three boxes and an old chair in the barn-yard and dragged them over and piled them one on top of another beneath the window. Then I climbed up and got inside. I had to be pretty careful inside because the window was right over three stalls and if I fell the horses would trample and kick me.

ADVENTURES OF THE RED-HAIRED BOY

Luckily for me the moon was shining straight in through the window and I could see everything pretty plainly. I crept along the beams very carefully until I got into the hay-loft. Oh, but the hay did feel soft and warm and good. I stretched out and had the finest sleep of my life. The big dinner bell woke me at noon. I did not want to go in just then before the meal, but as I was going down the ladder to look around, one of the farm hands saw me."

" 'Thief,' he cried. 'I have you, my fine young rascal.'

"He got me by the collar and hustled me into the house. I was good and mad, but when I tried to speak he pulled my collar so tight it almost choked me.

"The farmer's wife screamed when she saw him bringing me in and heard him crying, 'I've caught a thief!' There was great excitement and I could not say a word.

"When the man let go of my collar and the noise stopped enough for me to be heard I told them that I was not a thief and explained how I happened to be in the hay-loft. None of the men believed a word that I said, but the farmer's wife did.

" 'We will give the boy something to eat, anyhow,' she said, 'before we turn him away.'

THE HOUSE OF THE RED FOX

"So she made me sit down at the end of the table and eat with the rest. They had corned beef, cabbage and potatoes and they certainly did taste good to me. I was ashamed to eat so much, but I was just about starved. It was a good thing I did put away such a good meal because I did not get another for quite a long time.

"I started out as soon as I had thanked the farmer's wife. She said I had an honest face, but I know that the men thought I was crooked.

" 'I never yet saw a red-haired boy with a bad heart,' said the farmer's wife as I started off.

"Some day I hope I can go back and prove to them that this red-haired boy anyhow has not got such a bad heart as some of them thought.

"About nine in the evening I came to a little cottage by the side of the road. I knocked on the door and a woman called out to know who was there.

" 'A red-haired boy,' I said. So she let me in.

"There were lots of children around, about six I think. The oldest was about fourteen years old and the youngest was too small to walk. They all hung around me while I told them my story. Then the woman said,

ADVENTURES OF THE RED-HAIRED BOY

“ ‘ We are very poor and we cannot give you much. But you are welcome to what we have.’

“ She gave me some weak tea and hard bread without butter. The long walk and cold air had given me such an appetite that even the hard bread tasted good. They asked me to stay all night. The oldest boy said I could have his share of one bed and he would sleep on the floor. I would not let him do that so I slept on the floor myself. In the morning I had a breakfast of more hard bread and weak tea before I left them. I hope some day I will have a lot of money and then I will go back and pay them a hundred times for their kindness.”

Mary Ellen thought that would be very nice.

CHAPTER XVII

THE QUEER OLD WOMAN

“WELL,” said the Red-haired Boy, “about three o’clock in the afternoon I came to a high fence. I thought there must be a house somewhere near so I climbed over the fence and started across the field.

“I had got almost across when a wild horse spied me and started to chase me. I ran as fast as I could, but just barely got over the fence at the other end of the field in time to escape his hoofs.

“I was so out of breath that I had to rest for a minute before I could get up. It is a good thing I did wait to get my breath and rest because I had hardly got half way across the field when a big black bull came tearing after me. I leaped over the fence about a minute before he reached it. Poor fellow! I suppose he did not like the colour of my hair.

“In the third field there was a red cow. When I saw her walking towards me I walked a little faster to keep ahead of her. The faster I went the faster she followed until the first

THE QUEER OLD WOMAN

thing I knew I had to run as fast as I could to keep ahead of her.

"I was about sick of being chased when I jumped over the fourth fence. I sat down to get a good rest before I went any further. I did not like to go any further on this farm where the animals looked so vicious, but still I could not go back the way I had come. So I kept on.

"This last field sloped upward and when I got to the top I could see a nice little farmhouse lower down on the other side of the slope.

"I started for the house and had begun to think I was safe from the animals when a dog ran out of the barn and came snapping and barking at my heels. He got worse every minute and I had to kick out pretty lively to keep him from taking little bites out of my leg. He had the tail of my coat in his mouth when I got inside the kitchen door and slammed it in his face. See where he tore it."

Mary Ellen examined the place on the Red-haired Boy's coat where the dog had torn it.

The Red-haired Boy went on :

"The little old woman who was in the kitchen turned around just as if she had been expecting me.

"So you got past them all,' she said.

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“‘Your animals are all very vicious,’ I answered. ‘They have all chased me and I know they would have killed me if they had caught me.’

“‘Of course they would,’ she answered. ‘It is a good thing you could run fast enough to get away. Now you can stay here for a while.’

“‘You seem to have been expecting me ——’ I said.

“‘I have been expecting you,’ she answered.

“‘But I do not intend to stay here,’ I went on. ‘I have important business to attend to. So if you will tell me how to get out without crossing the field in which those animals are, I shall go.’

“‘Oh, no, my fine lad,’ said the old woman. ‘Not so fast. I need you here for a while. There are vicious cows, angry bulls, and wild horses in the fields on all four sides of this farm. So you will have to stay until I am willing to let you go. I need a good strong boy like you to help here with the farm work. So you will have to stay here until the work is done and I do not need you any more.’

“I was terribly angry when the old woman spoke like that. I made up my mind I would not do a thing to help her about the farm and

THE QUEER OLD WOMAN

thought that she would soon get tired of having me around doing nothing.

"But when supper time came she made some fine hot biscuits and the best soup! I was so hungry I could not help eating and after I had eaten, of course, I wanted to do something to pay for my meal. So I pumped water for her, chopped wood, fixed the fire and locked up the barn.

"‘You may sleep here,’ she said, pointing to a lounge in the kitchen. ‘It is warm and comfortable and much better for you than wandering around in lonely fields on a cold night.’

"That was true and I did sleep well. She woke me up about five in the morning and gave me a fine hot breakfast. I was ashamed to sulk, so I asked her what she wanted me to do. She had plenty for me to do and I kept pretty busy. She always treated me well and in a few days I made up my mind to do all I could to earn my board until I could get away. I used to feed the cattle, milk the cows, churn the butter, pump water and chop wood.

"The first night I was there I almost hated the old woman and thought she was too mean to live. But as the days went by and she never spoke a cross word to me, gave me three good meals a day, and a nice warm place to

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sleep, I began to like her. And she began to like me. We got quite fond of one another and enjoyed talking together in the evening. She was a smart old woman and told me lots of things. The funny part of it was that she knew all about my past life and my friends.

"After I had been there three weeks she said, "Now, my boy, I am going to tell you something that will surprise you. I brought you here to see what sort of a boy you were and I have learned that you are all right. The work is about finished up now and as soon as you can get that pile of wood in the yard chopped up I shall let you go to find your parents and sister.

"What is more, when the time comes I shall tell you just where to go to find them."

"I got awfully excited when she said that and I wanted her to tell me right away. But she would not tell me until the time came.

"The next morning I got up an hour earlier than usual and started to chop the wood. It was a big job and I made so little progress that it seemed as if I never would finish it. I was afraid it would take me a month to get it chopped.

"When the old woman came down and saw what I was about she felt rather badly to think I was so anxious to leave her. She did not say much, however, and I kept at the wood

THE QUEER OLD WOMAN

chopping so steadily that at the end of about ten days the pile was finished. On the tenth day, when we had finished supper and everything was put away, the old lady sat down on one side of the table and told me to sit on the other. Then she took a piece of paper and drew a map.

“ ‘Follow this road,’ she said, ‘and you will come to the castle where your sister lives. She is not happy there and you must try to rescue her and take her home to your parents. Her husband is a good man and if he wants to go with you take him too.’

“ ‘But,’ I said, ‘my parents left home before I did. It would break my sister’s heart if I took her home and our father and mother were not there.’

“ ‘Wait, boy,’ she said. ‘I have not told you one half of what I know.’ She pointed to another spot on the map and said, ‘This is where your father and mother now live. But before you go to them you must free your sister and force the old queen, her mother-in-law, to break the charm that is keeping your parents away from you.’

“ All this sounded very easy, but I knew it would not be so easily done. I asked her how I could free my sister and how I could force the old queen to break the charm, but the old lady would not tell me. I decided to do the

THE HOUSE OF THE RED FOX

best I could, and so I started off the next morning.

"The little old lady went across the fields with me to protect me from the animals. She gave me a bone to throw to the dog, a corn-stalk for the cow, a big lump of salt for the bull and a lump of sugar for the horse.

" 'Now, if you ever want to come back to see me,' said the old lady, 'these animals will let you pass.'

"At the farthest fence she bade me 'Good-bye and good luck' and I was out in the world again."

"I came straight to the castle, met you and that is all. You see I have not rescued my sister, I have not forced the old queen to free my parents, and the only thing left for me now is to find them. Do you think you could take me to them?"

"Yes," said Mary Ellen, with tears in her eyes. "I will take you to your father and mother. I almost wish I had done something to the old queen. To think she would bewitch them into foxes."

"I have been trying for two nights to get into the castle," said the Red-haired Boy. "I tried to scrape a hole in the wall, but they have frozen it so hard that it was impossible. I have about given up."

THE QUEER OLD WOMAN

Then the goat spoke.

“My horns are sharp,” she said. “Maybe I could make a hole. If I cannot do it we may as well give up.”

CHAPTER XVIII

MARY ELLEN AND THE RED-HAIRED BOY

SO the goat went out and Mary Ellen settled down with the baby in her arms to sleep in the soft hay. All night the Red-haired Boy stood guard at the door and the goat scraped at the castle wall. In the morning she came back to the hut.

"It is no use," she said. "The wall is harder than stone."

"What shall we do?" said Mary Ellen in despair. "We cannot stay out here forever with this baby."

"We might take the baby to the old woman," said the Red-haired Boy, "and we could go and find my father and mother."

"No, no," said Mary Ellen. "Wherever I go I shall take the baby with me until I can find the princess and give him back again."

"Well," said the Red-haired Boy, "the sooner we start the quicker we shall get there. So let us be off."

They put the baby in the go-cart, and with the Red-haired Boy pushing and Mary Ellen

MARY ELLEN AND THE RED-HAIRED BOY

and the goat walking alongside, they started off.

It was hard work pushing the go-cart up hills and holding it back going down. But the Red-haired Boy was strong and kept at it steadily until they reached the top of the high hill where Dr. Fox had left Mary Ellen. There they sat down to rest and Mary Ellen said,

"Now I cannot remember which of these roads is the one we came by."

For there were two roads that led from the top of the hill.

"While you are sitting here resting," said the goat, "I shall go a little way on the road and see where it leads me."

After about an hour she came back.

"I went a long way," she said, "without seeing anything or anybody. At last I came to a field where a horse was pastured. He told me that the road did finally lead to a great forest, but that the forest was a long journey from here."

"It must be the road, then," said Mary Ellen, "because Dr. Fox could travel about three times as fast as we can and it took him a night and a day to bring me here."

The Red-haired Boy said he had rested enough, so they set out on the right road. They walked all that day, and when night

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came there was no place of shelter near by and they had to sit under an old tree until morning. The wind was cold, but the ground was dry and Mary Ellen had grown so strong and healthy while she lived in the castle of ice that she did not mind sleeping out-of-doors very much. Of course the snow baby did not mind it at all.

About noon on the third day they came to the forest. Here the Red-haired Boy and Mary Ellen did not know which way to go to find the little house where the doctor and his wife lived. But even as they were studying the map and trying to find the road, a hare leaped across their path, and jumped into a bush.

"Oh," cried Mary Ellen. "I do believe that is Johnny Hare."

The poor little hare, frightened as he was by the sight of human beings, knew Mary Ellen's voice and jumped out of the bush.

"Oh, Johnny, is that really you?" cried Mary Ellen. "How you have changed."

"Will that Red-haired Boy hurt me?" asked Johnny, keeping his eye out for danger.

"No, no," said Mary Ellen. "Do not be afraid of him. I am so glad to see you. We are going to see the doctor and his wife in the little house of snow. We must be quite near there now that we have met you."



ABOUT NOON ON THE THIRD DAY THEY CAME TO THE FOREST

MARY ELLEN AND THE RED-HAIRED BOY

"No," said Johnny. "You are a long way from it. I moved since I saw you last. That is how you happened to see me in this part of the forest."

Mary Ellen was disappointed.

"Are we really such a long way from home?" she asked. "Can you tell us how to find it?"

"I can take you as far as the river," said the hare. "You ought to be able to find it then."

It was night before they reached the river. The hare was used to sleeping out of doors and he helped them make a nice comfortable nest of leaves and twigs. Then he left them.

In the morning they followed the river. Soon Mary Ellen was delighted to meet another of her friends. It was Tommy Beaver, who had got married and started housekeeping for himself. He walked a ways with them, talking merrily.

"It is a long time since I saw the doctor," he said. "My wife takes such good care of me now that I have never had to call the doctor in. I only get down to that part of the forest once in a great while. I have been too busy even to get down to see my father and mother more than twice this winter. When I got married I settled up here and had to help the beavers build our home. There is

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always plenty of work for everybody to do, so I do not get much time for play."

"The last time I saw my mother she said that every one missed you. All the hares and rabbits and squirrels were very lonesome after you went away. Well, my wife will be waiting for me so I must leave you here."

The jolly little fellow jumped into the water and swam away.

The ice was all gone out of the river now, for although the spring wind was often keen and cold the winter was almost over.

CHAPTER XIX

ALL GONE

AND now Mary Ellen's heart began to beat fast and her breath came hard. For they were so near the little house of snow that she was quite excited.

She walked faster and faster until they came to the bend in the river near which the house stood. Then she could wait no longer, so she started to run as fast as she could. The Red-haired Boy followed her with the baby carriage, spinning along at a great rate of speed, and the old goat trotted beside them.

The snow had melted away now and Mary Ellen found a little path that had been covered up before. They ran up this path, noticing how green the grass was and that a few early spring flowers, snowdrops and buttercups were springing up.

Then Mary Ellen looked up.

THE LITTLE HOUSE OF SNOW WAS GONE!

She rubbed her eyes and looked again. But

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no little house of snow appeared. She pinched herself to see if she was awake. It was no use. The little house of snow was gone.

Mary Ellen looked around to make sure this was the right place. There were the same big trees that had been bare and leafless when she went away. They were now just beginning to put forth their soft little green leaves. But Mary Ellen was sure they were the same trees. There were the two rose bushes that had stood beside the door. But there was no door. There was the hazel bush that had stood outside the window; and the maple tree that had towered above the chimney. But the window and the chimney were gone.

When at last Mary Ellen was sure they were at the right place and that the little house of snow was really and truly gone, she sank down in a despairing little heap at the foot of the maple tree and sobbed as if her heart would break.

"It is no use," she said. "It is no use to try to find them now. The old queen has done something to Dr. Fox and his good wife."

The Red-haired Boy looked around in despair. He shut his teeth tight and closed his eyes to keep the tears back. It was pretty hard after all these dreary months of searching to find his parents gone without leav-

ALL GONE

ing any address or message behind them. For a few minutes it seemed to him as if nothing in the world would ever come right again.

He walked around the yard and down the path, fighting the awful feeling of homesickness that came over him. Then he braced up and went back to the maple tree where Mary Ellen was still lying.

"There, there," he said, patting her shoulder just as his father used to do. "Don't cry, Mary Ellen. Things will surely turn out all right in the end."

Well, Mary Ellen felt terribly sad about the doctor and his wife, but she knew that lying there and crying would do no good. When she saw how bravely the Red-haired Boy took his disappointment she dried her eyes and stood up saying,

"We have taken too much from the old queen. Now I am going straight back to the castle and I will get in somehow."

"I am with you," said the Red-haired Boy. "We will never give up until my father and mother are free once more."

With brave hearts they started back the way they had come. On the journey in search of the little house of snow the Red-haired Boy and Mary Ellen had been full of hope and had talked most merrily of the bad times that

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were past and the good times that were coming. But now they went swiftly on their way and could not talk because they were wondering sadly what had become of the doctor and his wife.

The grass and trees were so green, the little flowers were smiling up at them so sweetly and all the birds and animals in the forest were happy because spring had come. But Mary Ellen and the Red-haired Boy were so anxious to get back to the castle that they did not stop to talk with any one.

Tommy Beaver walked a ways with them and heard about the disappearance of the little house of snow. Johnny Hare came jumping out as they passed his way and offered to hunt through the whole forest for the doctor and Mrs. Fox.

Mary Ellen had thought they were walking as fast as they could on the journey from the castle. But now they were so anxious to get back that they made the journey in one half day less.

On the evening of the third day they stood at the foot of the hill on the other side of which was the castle.

"I am so tired," said Mary Ellen. "I cannot try to get in to-night."

"Rest here, to-night, then," said the Red-

ALL GONE

haired Boy, "and in the morning you will feel stronger and better."

As the first bright rays of the morning sun fell across Mary Ellen's face, she awoke.

"Come," she cried to the Red-haired Boy. "It is daybreak and we must make the old queen free your father and mother."

The Red-haired Boy jumped up and started up the hill, pushing the go-cart before him. The goat leaped ahead of them and reached the top first. Mary Ellen panted after her.

And now, dear children who read this book, I can hardly bear to go on. For I know how sorry you will feel when I tell you that poor Mary Ellen looked down into the valley and saw that the castle was gone.

When she saw the bare and empty valley spread beneath her and knew that the castle and the old witch queen were gone, her last hope of rescuing the doctor and his wife and the princess left her.

Gone was the little house of snow, gone was the castle, the doctor, Mrs. Fox and the princess. Everything in the world that Mary Ellen and the Red-haired Boy loved, was gone.

There was Mary Ellen with the baby in her care and no one to depend on but the Red-haired Boy. She turned to him now.

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He, too, was looking down into the lonely valley where the great castle of ice had once stood. He turned away and they all started down the hill again.

CHAPTER XX

LITTLE OLD LADY

WITHOUT saying a word and without thinking or planning where they were going, they walked on and on.

After they had walked quite a long time they came to a fenced field. A horse put his head over the fence and neighed at them. The Red-haired Boy looked up.

"Mary Ellen," he cried. "Oh, Mary Ellen! that is White Star, the little old lady's horse."

At the words "little old lady" Mary Ellen's mind flew back to the very beginning of her adventures.

"Not my little old lady," she said.

"No, no," cried the Red-haired Boy. "Mine. The one with whom I stayed this winter. Let us cross the fields and go to her house."

They took the baby out of the carriage and put him under the fence. Mary Ellen crawled under, the Red-haired Boy climbed over, and the goat jumped over.

The horse walked beside them until they

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came to the second field. The bull was not friendly, but neither was he savage. So they crossed the second field safely and came to the third. In the third field the cow walked beside them until they reached the yard. The dog in the yard was so glad to see the Red-haired Boy again that he jumped all over him.

The kitchen door was open and the little old lady was standing at the table making a cake. She held out her hands as she saw them coming and the Red-haired Boy took one and Mary Ellen the other.

For it was Mary Ellen's Little Old Lady too. Her Little Old Lady and the Red-haired Boy's Little Old Lady were one and the same.

She listened while the children told her the long, sad story of their wanderings. The tears came to her eyes when she heard of their many disappointments.

"And when we saw that the castle was gone, we gave up," said Mary Ellen with a sob.

"Poor children," said the Little Old Lady. "You poor, poor children. You need worry no more. The old queen is dead and the castle and all the soldiers have melted away. Your father and mother are free now and I shall send you back to them to-night."

LITTLE OLD LADY

It seemed almost too good to be true. The Red-haired Boy tossed his cap to the ceiling and Mary Ellen danced with joy. The baby clapped his little fat hands and the goat frisked around.

For the first time the little old lady noticed the goat.

"Where did you find my goat?" she asked.

The goat looked ashamed.

"They did not find me," she said. "I found them. I ran away because I was tired of being shut up in fields, but now I have seen a good deal and I am ready to come back."

"We never dreamed she was your goat," said the Red-haired Boy.

"It is all right as long as she came back," said the little old lady. "It was probably a good thing for you to have her with you for she is old and wise."

All this time the little old lady had been beating and stirring the cake. She now poured the batter into a little pan.

"The minute I put this cake in the oven," she said, "you must all count seven seven times. Do not start until I have closed the door."

"Must I count, too?" asked the goat anxiously.

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"Yes," said the little old lady. "The more that count the better it will be."

"But I do not know how," said the goat.

"Well just nod your head to my count," said the Red-haired Boy. "That will probably answer."

The little old lady put the cake in the oven, closed the door, and they all started to count,—the Red-haired Boy counting out loud and the goat nodding her head.

They counted seven seven times.

Then the little old lady took the cake out of the oven.

In that short time it raised up and browned beautifully. It was a lovely looking cake, so soft and brown and even. The little old lady set it down to cool.

In a few moments she cut it and gave Mary Ellen and the Red-haired Boy each a piece of it.

"You must go and stand outside the door while you eat it," she said. "Close your eyes before you take your first bite and do not open them until you have eaten the last crumb."

"But how about the baby?" asked Mary Ellen. "Will he be left out of the charm just because he cannot eat cake?"

"No," said the little old lady, putting the baby in his buggy. "You must each keep

LITTLE OLD LADY

one hand on the baby's buggy while you are eating the cake. Now follow these directions closely and see what will happen."

CHAPTER XXI

SWEET HOME

THEY took their cake and went outside, each with a hand on the baby-carriage.

Mary Ellen was a tiny bit frightened, but she closed her eyes and ate the cake in silence. When the last crumb was gone she said, with her eyes still closed,

“Have you finished your cake?”

“Just a minute,” said the Red-haired Boy.

“One, two, three. Ready.”

They opened their eyes.

They were still standing in a yard with a door right behind them. For a moment Mary Ellen thought it was the door of the little old lady's house and felt disappointed because nothing had happened.

But in another moment she saw that the house was very much larger than the cottage of the little old lady.

“I know where we are,” cried the Red-haired Boy.

He pounded on the door and Mary Ellen



THEY TOOK THEIR CAKE AND WENT OUTSIDE, EACH WITH A HAND
ON THE BABY CARRIAGE

SWEET HOME

took the baby in her arms and stood behind him.

The door was opened by —

THE PRINCESS

She gave a scream when she saw Mary Ellen and held out her arms for the baby.

Mary Ellen was dazed by all the excitement. She saw a strange woman hugging the Red-haired Boy and in half a second she, herself, was lifted off her feet by the strong arms of a big man. She looked up into his face. He was a middle-aged man with a red beard. For a moment Mary Ellen thought she had never seen him before.

"Mary Ellen," he was saying. "Don't you know the old doctor?"

Of course Mary Ellen knew that gruff kind voice. Of course she knew those merry twinkling eyes. It was Dr. Fox,—the real Dr. Fox, no longer in the shape of an animal, but his own true manly self again.

Mary Ellen turned to the woman who was hugging the Red-haired Boy. Yes, it was Mrs. Fox. Mary Ellen put her arms around her neck in the same old way.

"Dear little girl," said Mrs. Fox. "You must never leave us again. I am so glad to have you and my boy back with me again.

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We shall stay together now and never part again."

"Dear Mary Ellen," said the princess, kissing her again and again. "The baby looks just fine. I know you have taken good care of him."

Then they all sat down. Every one wanted to talk at once and ask questions all at once and hear everything all at once.

The Red-haired Boy told his adventures from the very beginning and Mary Ellen told what had happened to her after she left the castle.

Then the princess told how the old queen had died and set all the charms free and the doctor told how they had all come home again.

For this was home. They were all back in the town where they used to live, the town where Mary Ellen and the Red-haired Boy had coasted down the long hill early in the winter.

It was the same town where Mary Ellen had worked so hard and been so lonely and unhappy. But she could never be so again. For the doctor and his wife said they could never let her go away from them and that she must live with them and be their own little girl, just as she had been in the little house of snow.

CHAPTER XXII

MARY ELLEN'S AUNT

“**D**ON'T you remember the first night you came to us, Mary Ellen?” asked Mrs. Fox that night as she tucked Mary Ellen into the big spare bed and kissed her good-night. “You were so frightened because you thought we were real animals and might eat you.”

“Yes,” answered Mary Ellen. “I remember how frightened I was just at the first minute I saw you. But just as soon as you spoke, I knew you were kind and good and I was not so much frightened.”

“How glad we were to see you, dear. You will never know how happy it made us to have you with us. At that time I often used to think we should never have our own son and daughter with us again and the only happiness I had was in taking you for my own little girl.”

“Oh, Mother Fox,” said Mary Ellen, sitting up in the bed and putting her arms around Mrs. Fox's neck and hugging her in the same old way, “never, never let me leave you. I was so afraid that when you got your

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own son and daughter back you would not want me any more."

"Darling Mary Ellen," exclaimed Mrs. Fox, "you are as much my own dear child as they are. Do you think I could ever forget how you braved the dangers of the castle of snow and nursed the princess back to life and health? No indeed, dear, you must stay with us for ever and ever."

"I shall go in the morning and tell my aunt that I am going to stay with you after this," said Mary Ellen.

Then Mrs. Fox left her and Mary Ellen fell back on the pillows and in another minute was fast asleep. For she was very tired and the big soft bed felt very good to her as she had not slept in a bed since the last night in the castle. Now it seemed as if all her troubles and hard journeys were over and done with and she could sleep and eat and live like other children. So Mary Ellen dreamed happy dreams and rested well.

When she awoke in the morning she wondered for a moment where she was. As soon as she remembered, she jumped gaily out of bed, dressed herself and ran down-stairs, thinking of the first morning when she woke up in the little house of snow.

She found the princess and Mrs. Fox waiting for her in the dining-room.

MARY ELLEN'S AUNT

"Good-morning," said Mrs. Fox, just as she had said it that first morning in the house of snow. "Have you had enough sleep?"

"Yes, ma'am," answered Mary Ellen. "Good-morning, Princess, and good-morning you precious, precious baby," bending over the cradle and kissing the baby who was laughing and crowing and punching at the air.

"Nobody will call me Princess any more," said the princess laughing. "The castle and all my husband's people are gone and we are back in an every-day, ordinary American town. So after this we shall be just plain Mr. and Mrs. Snow."

"You will always be the princess to me," cried Mary Ellen. "I shall never call you anything else."

It was so late when Mary Ellen awoke that every one else had eaten breakfast. The doctor had started on his rounds and the Red-haired Boy had gone out to find some of the other town boys and tell them about his wonderful adventures.

When Mary Ellen had eaten, she stood up and looked out of the window for a moment.

"I must go and tell my aunt some time, so I might as well go and have it over," she said with a sigh.

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"Yes, dear," said Mrs. Fox. "I was just going to say that you ought to go to see her. She has probably worried a good deal while you were away and it is only right that she should know you are alive and well taken care of."

So Mary Ellen put on her hat and coat and started for her aunt's house. The streets looked strange to her although it was only a few months since she had speeded through the town in the chopping bowl. She laughed now as she thought of it.

"How frightened I was," she thought. "How I wanted the chopping bowl to stop. If I had only known what was before me! Well, in spite of all the danger and trouble I have been through, I am very, very glad I went, because, as the doctor said, everything did turn out for the best and I got a hundred times more happiness out of my adventures than trouble or hardship."

Mary Ellen had never gone in through the front door at her aunt's house and it did not occur to her to go in that way now. She quietly walked around to the back, opened the kitchen door and stepped in.

"Mercy on us," screamed her aunt, flopping into the nearest chair. "Mary Ellen, is it you or is it your ghost?"

"It is not my ghost," answered Mary

MARY ELLEN'S AUNT

Ellen. "It is really I, alive and well and happy."

"Alive and well and happy!" cried her aunt. "It is very easy for you to walk in on me and frighten me to death and then say you are alive and well and happy. Where have you been all this time? That is the question I should like to ask. How dare you go away like that without saying a word to me and leave me to do all the work alone."

"I could not help it, aunt. The chopping bowl just took me."

"I heard about that chopping bowl affair," said her aunt sternly. "Fine doings, I must say, for the child I raised to steal my chopping bowl and run off with it."

"I did not run off with it," cried Mary Ellen. "It ran off with me. And oh, I did not steal it, indeed I did not. I will bring it back to you to-morrow and if it is not as good as when I took it away, the doctor will buy you a new one."

"This is a queer business," said the aunt. "Who is the doctor and what has he got to do with my chopping bowl?"

"I could never explain everything to you," said Mary Ellen, "so I am not going to try. But I have been living with Dr. and Mrs. Fox in another place ever since I went away and now they have come back and I

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am still going to live with them on Spring Street."

"Are you, indeed?" cried her aunt. "And what do you think I am going to do?"

Mary Ellen could think of no answer to this, so she kept silent.

"Do you think I am always going to let you do just as you please? Do you think I shall let you run off whenever you please and come back when you please and then tell me you are going to live with somebody else?"

Still Mary Ellen was silent.

"Who is going to do the work for me if you go to stay with this doctor? No, Mary Ellen, I have had a hard enough time while you were away and now that you are back I shall take good care that you never go again. Take off your hat and coat and forget all this nonsense you have been telling me. Make up your mind to stay, for stay you must."

"Oh, aunt," cried Mary Ellen, "do not make me stay. Do not keep me away from the doctor and his wife who were so good to me and who want me so much. Please, please let me go to the people I love and with whom I was so happy."

"Do not tease," answered her aunt. "It is of no use. Take off your hat and coat and make up your mind to stay. In a few days you will forget all about these strange people."

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"I can never, never forget them," sobbed Mary Ellen.

Poor Mary Ellen. She begged and implored, but her aunt still said no.

"Just let me go to tell them, then," she begged at last. "Oh, they will think I have deserted them if I do not go back. Just let me tell them."

"No," said her aunt. "If I let you go, you might never come back and I might never see you again. Take off your hat and coat and peel the potatoes and set the table and you will soon settle down and be just as happy with me as you ever were."

There was no way Mary Ellen could see of getting away, so she had to obey her aunt and stay.

CHAPTER XXIII

HAPPY FOREVER AFTER

ALL day Mrs. Fox watched and waited and wondered why Mary Ellen did not come.

"Do you think she made up her mind to stay with her aunt?" asked the doctor anxiously, when he got home for dinner and Mary Ellen had not appeared.

"There is something keeping her," answered Mrs. Fox. "Mary Ellen would never stay away from us like this unless something had happened."

"If she does not come pretty soon," said the doctor, "I shall go to her aunt's house and find out what is keeping her."

They waited until half-past eight and as she had not come the doctor and his wife started out to look for her.

When they rang the bell, her aunt came to the door.

"Yes, Mary Ellen is here," she said, "and she is going to stay here. She is my niece and I am not going to give her up to strangers."

"We must have her," said the doctor firmly.

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"Oh, please let her come home with us," said Mrs. Fox. "We love her as much as our own children and can never be happy without her."

"No," said the aunt. "I cannot get along without her. There is a great deal of work to be done here and Mary Ellen is the only one I have ever had to help me."

Well, they talked and talked and talked. The aunt was bound to keep Mary Ellen and the doctor was bound to get her.

"I would give you a thousand dollars to-morrow," said the doctor at last, "if you would only give up all claims and let us adopt her as our own little girl."

The aunt thought this offer over for a few moments, then said :

"If I thought you would keep your promise and really meant that, I might let you have her."

"Of course I mean it," cried the doctor eagerly. "You know who I am now and I assure you you shall have the money in the morning."

"Well," said the aunt, "Mary Ellen is in bed now, but you send the money in the morning and I will let you have her."

"Can't we see the child to-night for just a moment?" asked Mrs. Fox, who was anxious to see that Mary Ellen was all right.

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"You can take a look at her," answered the aunt crossly, "if you think it will do you any good. I am sure I do not see what makes you like her so much. She always seemed just like every other child to me, more bother than she was worth."

"She is the best child that ever lived," cried Mrs. Fox indignantly. "She is no bother at all, but is a great help and comfort to everybody because she is so sensible."

The aunt took Dr. Fox and his wife into Mary Ellen's bedroom. They went in very quietly because they thought Mary Ellen would be sleeping. She was lying on the bed, but she was not sleeping. As they opened the door they heard a smothered sob.

"Mary Ellen," cried Mrs. Fox. "Little Mary Ellen, do not cry, my poor darling. We have come to take you home with us."

"We said we could never let you go," said the doctor's deep voice, "and we won't."

For a moment Mary Ellen did not turn to look at them as she thought she must have fallen asleep and was dreaming. But when she did turn her head and look up at them she found it was no dream.

It was true. Oh, it was true. The doctor and his wife could not get along without her and had come to take her home. In a

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moment she had jumped out of bed and started to pull her shoes on.

"Get back into bed," cried her aunt. "You are not to go until morning."

"Take me to-night," begged Mary Ellen, looking from the doctor to his wife. "I shall not sleep all night if I stay here."

Mrs. Fox sat down on the bed and put her arms around Mary Ellen.

"Please let us have her to-night," she said to the aunt.

"Well, if she is so anxious to go, take her," cried the aunt. "That is all the thanks I get for raising her. She turns from me to a stranger."

But no one who saw the cross, sour face of the aunt could blame Mary Ellen for turning to the kind, motherly Mrs. Fox.

It only took Mary Ellen a moment to dress and then, with the doctor on one side and Mrs. Fox on the other, she left her aunt's house forever.

"You can sleep in the spare bedroom to-night, dear," said Mrs. Fox. "But as long as our home is going to be your home we must fix up a cozy little room for you to have all for your own."

"That will be lovely," said Mary Ellen. "Do you know how I should like it fixed up?"

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"No, dear, but it shall be just as you wish. How would you like it?"

"I should like it furnished just like my room in the castle of snow. That was such a pretty little room."

"Very well," said Mrs. Fox. "To-morrow you and the princess can go down-town and get the furniture."

So the next day Mary Ellen and the princess went down and bought white wall paper and white carpet with blue flowers, blue and white striped curtains, a little white bed, a little white dressing-table, and two little white chairs. Then they fixed her bedroom up and if you had stepped into it you would have thought it was the blue and white room in the castle of snow.

So Mary Ellen was never unhappy or lonely again. The doctor and his wife were like a father and mother to her, the princess was like a dear big sister, the Red-haired Boy a jolly good brother, and the baby was the sweetest and best baby that ever lived. As for Mary Ellen herself, you may be sure that she grew up sensible and unselfish and repaid a hundredfold all the kindness she received from her dear friends.



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